United Nations E/CN.6/2000/NGO/5

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
14 January 2000

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Forty-fourth session
28 February–2 March 2000
Item 3 (b) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women: emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality between women and men

Statement submitted by the International Federation on Ageing, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 26 July 1996.

* * *

The Fourth Global Conference on Ageing, held at Montreal, finalized a document which was the result of deliberations and input from member groups, involving more than 1,200 participants from 68 countries. Excerpts from the proceedings are set out below.

The world is facing unprecedented change. In the next 30 years, the world's population of older persons is expected to triple, with much of this increase taking place in developing countries. All societies are enriched by their older people and demographic change will increase the potential for even greater benefits.

Ageing is a natural process of life. Older persons are a valuable resource. They are the repositories of tradition, culture, knowledge and skills. These attributes are essential in maintaining intergenerational links.

The vast majority of older persons make vital contributions to their societies, families and communities as workers, caregivers, volunteers, mentors and active citizens.

There is an increase in inequities between developing and developed countries, between rural and urban environments, and within individual countries.

The United Nations and its Member States need to develop strategies with realistic goals and measurable objectives so as to ensure that the world's population ages well and that older persons' needs for a secure and productive future are met.

We note with concern that the 1991 United Nations Principles for Older Persons are still not universally recognized nor adhered to; neither has the 1982 Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing been fully implemented.

Therefore, we call upon the United Nations and its agencies to work with national Governments, non-governmental organizations and the corporate, private and voluntary sectors in addressing the urgent issues set out below.

* E/CN.6/2000/1.

00-25021 (E) 280100

Issues

Many older persons throughout the world lack access to the essentials of life as the result of discrimination on the basis of age, disability, ethnicity, race gender or religion, or because of employment practices and legislative barriers. Women, as the majority of the ageing population, suffer disproportionately from poverty, poor health and isolation.

Poverty and exclusion remain the greatest threats to older women worldwide. Inequalities in income and waged employment, as well as inheritance and property law, mean that older women tend to be more impoverished and dependent than older men.

Too many live in poverty, beyond the reach of even basic social well-being. Given the additional fact that women can expect to live 5-10 years longer than their male counterpart, and are also more likely to become widows, increasing consideration for the financial situation of older women must be addressed.

Older persons with disabilities face cultural and socio-economic barriers which impact on their quality of life.

Developing countries face the most rapid rate of population ageing and the greatest economic difficulties but lack the necessary financial, social and health infrastructures to address these issues.

In many parts of the world, older women suffer multiple disadvantages on the basis of gender, ranging from abandonment to failing health. Many enter old age in a poor state of health resulting from lifelong deprivation. Although women live longer than men, they are not necessarily healthier. They are more likely to suffer from osteoporosis, hypertension, cancer and cardiac arrest. Older women are at greater risk of depression (about twice that of men) because of social isolation, financial hardship, caregiving burnout and lack of control over their life situations. Female-headed households are generally more impoverished and dependent on the family and the state for health-care services, especially for the older women among them.

The devastating effects of conflict and illnesses, such as AIDS, have drastically altered the population structure of some countries, exposing older persons to greater vulnerability.

Grandmothers, who must often care for their orphaned grandchildren due to the deaths of their children from AIDS, are at risk for contracting AIDS themselves because they are uninformed of the precautions required in caring for HIV-positive grandchildren.

We reaffirm the 1982 Vienna International Action Plan on Ageing and the 1991 United Nations Principles for Older Persons (General Assembly resolution 46/91, annex). The Principles are enunciated in the following categories:

- Independence;
- Participation;
- Self-fulfilment and dignity.

The promotion of the Principles was one objective of the Secretary-General in launching and promoting the 1999 International Year of Older Persons.